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ADDRESS

DELIVERED

BY THE REV. E. AHENAKEW

At the Annual Meeting of THE WOMAN'S AUXILIARY
Held in the City of Prince Albert, Sask., on
Wednesday, June 16th, 1920.

NOW THAT peace has been declared, the Indians of Canada may look with just pride upon the part played by them in the Great War, both at home and on the field of battle. They have well and nobly upheld the loyal tradition of their gallant ancestors who rendered invaluable service to the British cause in 1775 and 1812 and have added thereto a heritage of deathless honor which is an example and an inspiration for their descendants.

Before the settlement of the Indians in the reservations, the idea of death, sudden and violent, was always in their minds. The times were such that no one could ever lie down to sleep with any feeling of security. Any night the enemy may surprise and attack, so that lasting vigilance was necessary. By night and by day somebody had to be ever on the watch. The blow fell usually quickly, suddenly and effectively. A deadly feud had arisen between the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Crees, some time in the darkness of the past, that Indian past from which no light penetrates to the present and about which we know nothing concerning the Great North-Western land. The human abhorrence for the snake was no worse than the hate that resulted from the feud. No quarter, no mercy was ever asked for nor given between them; each tribe was bent on exterminating the other. Each year ambitious young men stole away from their camps and secretly travelled across the hundreds of miles of prairie for the purpose of stealing the swiftest horses of the enemy and killing them if possible. It was a repetition of the old-time raids between the English and the Scotch. It is easy to see how living such a life would in time breed into the Indians warlike sentiments and enable them to obtain a certain amount of knowledge regarding military strategy. Much has been written about their warlike character, bravery and skill; some few have given a different opinion of them, but we may well judge from the conduct of our young men during their participation in the Great War as to what their ancestors must have been.

The news of the outbreak of war fell with a numbing thud upon our hearts, as it did upon yours. Owing to the ignorance of many of our people, it seemed far more terrible to many of us than it did to you perhaps. Your knowledge of geography at least shewed you the distance you were from danger, but for many of us there was no such comfort. As an example, one of our headmen from a northern reserve sent to ask me if it was true that the fighting was taking place just east of Battleford. Fight-

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ing in the air and under water is just a scientific matter with you; for many of our more ignorant people these things take on a semi-supernatural aspect.

After a little while, however, things began to take shape in the confused minds of the Indians. Our old men who had seen fighting in the old days were very much against our nation joining in [illegible]. They did all they could possibly do to discourage enlistment of the young men, not because they were disloyal, but because they shrank from seeing a thing happen which never happened before, or that an Indian should go and lay his bones to mingle with a soil that is not Canadian. Furthermore, it did not seem to them as if it were altogether England's quarrel, and much less did they think it was Canada's quarrel. England was only helping other nations and not fighting for her own life. "If our own land were attacked," they said, "it would then be up to every man of us to go, but not to this one."

Their gospel of discretion went to the winds. Youth is youth the world around, and we read in the Government report that over 4,000 Indians enlisted for active service with the C.E.F. This number represents approximately 35 per cent. of the Indian male population of military age in the nine provinces, and it must be remembered moreover that there were undoubtedly cases of Indian enlistment which were not reported to the Government. The Indian soldiers gave an excellent account of themselves at the front, and to quote the Minister of the Interior, "their officers have commended them most highly for their courage, intelligence, efficiency, stamina and discipline. In daring and intrepidity they were second to none, and their performance is a ringing rebuttal to the familiar assertion that the Red Man has deteriorated in spirit." The fine record of the Indians in the Great War appears in a peculiarly favourable light when it is remembered that their services were absolutely voluntary, as they were specially exempted from the operation of the Military Service Act, and that they were prepared to give their lives for their country without being compelled to do so or even the fear of compulsion. Furthermore it must be borne in mind that a large part of the Indian population is located in remote and inaccessible locations, are unacquainted with the English language and were therefore not in a position to understand the character of the war, its cause and effect. It is therefore a remarkable fact that the percentage of enlistments among them is fully equal to that among other sections of the community and indeed far above the average in a number of instances. As an inevitable result of the large enlistments among them and of their share in the thick of the fighting the casualties among them were very heavy, and the Indians, in common with their fellow countrymen of the white race, must mourn the loss of their most promising young men.

A few general remarks here I may make as an indication of what I am aiming at. The battalion which should interest us most in the West in this connection is the 107th Battalion, commanded by the late Lieut.-Colonel Glen Campbell of Winnipeg, formerly Chief Inspector of Indian Agencies. More than 500 Indians were on the roll of this pioneer battalion. There were in it Crees, Salteaux and Sioux from the North and West, Mohawks, Onondagas, Suscararas, Delawares and Chippewas of Ontario, and Micmacs from the Maritime Provinces. The Indian com-

pany of this battalion particularly distinguished itself by its coolness and efficiency in continuing at work under heavy fire during a terrific bombardment of Hill 70 near Lens. Three well-known athletes were here, Tom Longboat, Joe Keeps and John Mackaway. The fact that the fever for war took hold of Indians in all chances and conditions of life is shown by what John Campbell, a full-blooded Indian, did. He lived on the Arctic coast when the war broke out, and he travelled 3,000 miles by trail, by canoe and river steamers in order to enlist at Vancouver. Surely if ever an Indian had a good excuse to quietly keep out of the zone of danger this one certainly had, but he did not take advantage of that excuse.

The one section of warfare in which the Indians distinguished themselves most was sniping. Naturally taking to the use of the gun, they proved expert and deadly marksmen. It is said that they were unexcelled in this branch of fighting. It is claimed that they did much towards demoralising the entire enemy system of sniping. They displayed their old-time patience and self-control when engaged in this work, and would sit hour by hour at a vantage point waiting the appearance of the enemy at his sniping post. These Indian snipers recorded their prowess by the old-time picturesque method of notching their rifles for every observed hit. Corporal Pegahmagabow won the M.M. and two bars while doing [illegible] work. It is officially recorded of him as having killed the extraordinary number of 378 of the enemy by sniping. He is an Indian of Ontario, [illegible] province I hope appreciates having such a deadly person within it. He has a great deal to answer for, but he is not dead yet. Private Philip McDonald, an Iriquois, was killed after having destroyed 40 of the enemy by his deadly sharp-shooting Lance Corporal Norwest, an Alberta Indian of the 40th Batt., was credited officially with 115 observed hits. He was at last killed by a German sniper in August, 1918, while endeavouring to locate a nest of enemy sharpshooters. He won the M.M. and bar. One of our own Saskatchewan boys, Johnney Ballantyne of Battleford, killed 58 of the enemy and then had to come home on account of a kick he received on the knee while playing football. No German bullet ever touched him. As soon as he was well again he reinlisted and went back to the front. His brother, Jimmie Ballantyne, was another sniper who today wears as a souvenir a piece of German shrapnel an inch or so from his heart.

Many of our boys received decorations. In Ontario over ten men received either the D.C.M , the M.M. or the Russian Medal. The Iroquois alone received four or five. The British Columbia Indians, though in the past always a peaceful people, won the D.C M medals, and one M.M at least. One of our Saskatchewan Indians, Alexander Brass of File Hills, won the M.C., and three others, Joe Thunder, Joe Dreaver and Nathan Sanderson, each won the M.M. Joe Dreaver's sister is now at our Onion Lake Boarding School. These are not all, but they are enough to show that the Indian held his own in the manly game of war.

Besides deeds of mere bravery, some of noble self-sacrifice and also of having secure . information of great military value are recorded of them. John Pandash of Ontario, besides saving life under heavy fire, procured information at Hill 70 which saved a strategic point, and a serious reverse was averted in consequence Dave Kesik of the 52nd Batt., the tallest

man in his regiment, is specially reported of having unstrapped a machine gun from his shoulder, advanced 100 yards to the German position where he ran along the top of their trench, doing deadly execution with his rapid firing gun. He single-handed took thirty prisoners upon this occasion. He also hails from Ontario.

The head of the family of Bearfoot Onondagas, an old woman, sent four sons, two grandsons and a son-in-law to the front. Another Iroquois woman sent her husband, four sons and two sons-in-law to the war. Captain Stacey, an Iroquois, was appointed a member of the famous Colonel Bishop's "fighting circle" of air men, but the accident which caused his death occurred before taking his place in that renowned organization. Sergeant Clearsky, 114th Batt., crawled to a man in No Man's Land during a deadly gas attack, and, removing his own mask, placed it on the wounded man, thereby saving his life and getting himself severely gassed. Joe Thunder, of Saskatchewan, was separated from his platoon. Six Germans surrounded him. He bayonetted each of them, and they only managed to wound him, though somewhat severely. Lieutenant Albert Mountain Horse, a Blood Indian, one of our old enemies but a fine young ex-pupil of one of our own Church Schools, deported himself with great gallantry at the front. He was gassed three times and came home to die. His funeral in Calgary was one of the most impressive ceremonies that ever took place in that city.

One small band of eight men sent seven to the front, and only one was left and he was an old man of seventy odd years. The File Hills reserve, Saskatchewan, sent 24 out of its 38 men, and mostly all of them were married men. The Cote Band of old Fort Pelly sent 22 out of their 43 men. Such facts need no comments from me as they are eloquent in themselves. Our young men have shown that they have in them that which is of value to their land of nativity, if it can only be brought out.

I shall now mention the work we did in the country in connection with the war. From the outset the Indians, both as bands and as individuals, have been very generous in proportion to the means at their disposal in contributing to the Patriotic Fund, Red Cross, Belgian Relief and other war funds. Their donations in all amounted to $44,545.44. In addition to this, $8,750.00 was offered, but as the bands in question were not considered to be in a position to make the outlay, the Government could not sanction the expenditure. Our own Saskatchewan Indians gave as a total to all these funds $17,259.90. It is significant that Saskatchewan Indians, largely under the influence of the English Church, should have contributed so generously. Their contribution of $17,259.90 compares favourably with that of the Quebec Indians, who gave to all these funds the small sum of $180.00.

The File Hills Indians, Saskatchewan, alone gave $8562.00. Comparisons are odious, but I think these figures will show which Church working among the Indians deserves the most support from the Canadian people.

Here I want to pay my tribute to those who are naturally always in the background and are never noticed much. They as a class, and in as far as they have light, are worthy of respect. I refer to the Indian women. From early times they have always been eclipsed by the men;

they have always felt it their duty to be so. Their pride alwaye lay in being mothers, daughters or sisters of men who were the support and the protection of the Indian encampment during the troublous times that were. Certain rules of etiquette applicable in public but not in private life have been instrumental in causing misrepresentations to be made as regards their status in Indian life. As a general rule their's is not an unhappy nor menial life.

On many of the reserves, especially down East, the women formed Red Cross Societies and Patriotic Leagues. They carried on the work with energy and efficiency and were successful in the accomplishment of excellent results, They made bandages, provided various comforts for the soldiers, knitted socks, sweaters, mufflers, and also raised money for patriotic purposes. In making of baskets and in beadwork the Indian women found a novel and very successful means of securing funds for war needs by the sale of these wares.

I have now finished with the necessary statistics. They are as a rule an uninteresting necessity. The Government took a great deal of pains to procure exhaustive information in this matter in order that we may receive that credit which is due for the part our men took in the great war. The Indian nation has proved that at a crisis it can be counted upon to arise and do deeds of men in common with the white population.

They are wards of the Government; they do not vote and are therefore children in the eyes of the law, but it was not the part of children they played when need arose.

Now what is the significance of it all? The white people have always been well disposed towards us; they have always shown an interest, a friendliness and even respect, and these we appreciate. We are part and parcel of their adopted country. They have always felt a certain amount of responsibility for us, but for the first time they realize that we have made progress, that some of us have outgrown the status of children, that we have that in us which if developed and cultivated will be of value to the country, and that a time is coming, or has come, when many that have advanced so far are, if so they desire, to be permitted to take upon themselves the full responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. Already since the ending of the war 227 Indians with their families have passed out of wardship and are now Canadian citizens in every sense of the word. "I think," said the Minister of Interior, "it would be in the interest of "good administration if the provisions with regard to enfranchisement "were further extended so as to enable the Department to enfranchise in- "dividual Indians or a band of Indians without the necessity of obtaining "their consent thereto in cases where it is found upon investigation that "the continuance of wardship was no longer in the interest of the public "or the Indians."

Side by side with this is the question of Compulsory Education. The Minister of the Interior included this in his efforts to modify the Indian Act. Every Indian child is to be under the same kind of legislation as white children are under in reference to school attendance. He has to attend whether he wants to or not. Such a policy I myself have always advocated, and it would give me a great deal of pleasure were it to operate, for it would incidentally necessitate the Government building more

schools to accommodate the increased numbers of pupils. This new interest in the Indian has arisen out of the share he has taken in the war. It is an attempt to crawl out of the rut into which the Indians and the work among them have gone into more or less. It seems good policy, but were it not it is a promise of movement, and that were better than continued sameness of routine work year after year.

How does it affect the Indian's outlook on life? For the first time since the Treaty of 1876 the Indian has stood side by side with the white man upon the same plane and with equal chances. When death confronts, man stands with man as man, and if he be brave and efficient his name will be made. The war supplied this opportunity. The Indian feels that he has done a man's work and he will never again be content to stand aside, giving no voice to matters that affect him. The spirit of unrest has taken hold of him; it has stirred up in him desires he never felt before. He chafes under the circumstances which render him dumb before the public; from the Atlantic to the Pacific a feeling of brotherhood and the need of union has arisen among all the scattered Indian people. Tribes far removed from each other, unknown to each other and uninterested in each other now correspond and exchange opinions. The more civilized Indians of Ontario are imparting their broader outlook and greater progressiveness to the rest. A league has been formed, and most of the eastern reserves and many from British Columbia have eagerly joined. The Saskatchewan reserves are joining, as are those in Manitoba A provisional constitution has been drawn up The tone of it is good, wise and temperate. It has as its keynote earnest co-operation with the Government and loyalty to the persons of King George and the Royal Family. Its aims are the following: Better educational facilities appropriate to Indian needs; enlightenment on matters of health, especially with regard to tuberculosis and kindred diseases; the perpetuation of the memory of those of our nation who died in the field of battle while fighting for the cause of humanity and the protection of the families they left behind; mutual help and encouragement towards the improvement of ourselves in all departments of life; etc It also calls for representative meetings of Indians to be held from time to time in some central place for the purpose of discussing ways and means whereby we may raise ourselves above ourselves; also that a committee of the House of Commons might be deputed to meet our representatives whenever any legislation important to ourselves is being made; also that we hold fast as a nation to those privileges given us as conditions to our surrender of all claims to the country in the various treaties made with us in the past, and lastly that we encourage each other and help each other to co-operate heartily with the Government and the Canadian people in the work of reconstruction, and also in their efforts to better the condition of the Indians. The tone of this preamble to the constitution is good, but apart altogether from it all and apart from the fact of its turning out to be either a success or a failure, it is an outward and visible sign that our ambition to become something more than a dependent race has taken hold of the Indians. Aspirations to be something higher than they are now have taken hold of them, and I hope that the Government, instead of discouraging the League, will welcome it and guide its workings along proper channels. Far better

something like this than trying to help people who have no ambition, people who are content to live from generation to generation from hand to mouth, people with no interests and no ambitions extending outside of the narrow confines of an Indian reservation. The aims of the movement are a declaration against everything that savors of bolshevism: it is a straightforward, loyal and united effort of a people to gain their feet, people who are growing out of their present state and who are developing feelings that they have not felt since the older days. I personally feel in sympathy with the movement, and it is a matter of regret to me that I am unable to be present at the Great Indian Conference to begin in Manitoba this coming Tuesday.* Delegates from all over Canada, East and West, will meet here to discuss matters. The leading reserves in Saskatchewan at least will be represented. I have sent word of it and particulars about it to many reserves.

In the Conference will be Indians from down East who have arisen to important positions and who are capable of exerting suitable efforts towards attaining to their objective.

Supposing the Conference should fail in its objective, I still feel that the new spirit which prompted the Movement is not to be underrated. At last I see that which I have always longed for, to see the race dissatisfied with themselves and the conditions under which they live. It pained me to see the stoical indifference, the lethargy, the masklike countenance with which they viewed their condition. I longed to see the flicker of the old spirit, the spark of the old-time flint and the breakneck speed of the chase and the battle.

A sleeping nation is a hard nation to help. The awakening has come; the war has done its work.

Not in vain did our young men die in a strange land; not in vain are our Indian bones mingled with the soil of a foreign land for the first time since the world began; not in vain did the Indian fathers and mothers see their son march away to face what to them were ununderstandable dangers; the unseen tears of Indian mothers in many isolated Indian reserves have watered the seeds from which may spring those desires and efforts and aspirations which will enable us to reach sooner the stage when we will take our place side by side with the white people, doing our share of productive work and gladly shouldering the responsibilities of citizens in this our country.

*Since the foregoing was written the Woman's Auxiliary of the Diocese of Saskatchewan undertook to send the Rev. E. Ahenakew to the Conference.

THE BATTLEFORD PRESS